

Robert Rankin and the Battle of San Jacinto

Robert Rankin appears to have played a role in the weeks leading up to the Battle of San Jacinto. In this document we will review the evidence and speculate about the sequence of events and role that Rankin played.

1. Yoakum, Henderson, *History of Texas from Its First Settlement in 1685 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846*, Vol. 2, Redfield, New York, 1855. Page 132
Yoakum asserts that, "Houston had engaged Messrs. Hubert and Rankin, Indian agents, to sound the Cooshatties on the question of giving the Texans aid." No first names are given and no source information is provided. This appears to have occurred around the time of 15 Apr to 18 Apr 1836 based on Yoakum's chronology.
2. The land grants for Robert Rankin and Matthew Hubert were adjacent to each other in what would become San Jacinto County, so this likely identifies the men cited by Yoakum, and they were certainly familiar with one another.
3. Texas State Archives: Republic of Texas Claims, Claims #771 and #1342
Robert's son Frederick Harrison Rankin (1794-1874) is a documented Indian agent. These records appear to indicate he served in this capacity in 1837 and 1838.
4. Texas State Archives: Records of the Texas General Land Office, Republic Donation Voucher, File 001477, Frederick H. Rankin
In Jul 1881, Elizabeth Rankin, the widow of Frederick H. Rankin, files an affidavit claiming Fred was a commissioned officer under General Sam Houston for more than 3 months during the year 1836.
5. Handbook of Texas Online, Ann Patton Malone, "Rankin, Robert"
The biography of Robert Rankin in the Handbook of Texas indicates that Robert "was a friend of Sam Houston, and his influence with the Indians in the region was well known [and] Houston reputedly called upon him in the spring of 1836 to encourage neutrality among the Indians during the crucial Texan retreat toward San Jacinto." No specific source is cited for this fact, but the "Louis Wiltz Kemp Papers" are generally cited for the biography and appear to be the only one of the two citations that would have this information.
6. Texas State Archives: Records of the Texas General Land Office, Spanish Collection, Frederick H. Rankin Land Title, File SC 000001:6
By 1836, Frederick Rankin was a long-time resident of Texas. He arrived in Austin's Colony in the early 1820s and was granted land on 07 Jul 1824.
7. Eugene Barker, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1919: The Austin Papers*, Vol. I Part 2, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1924, pp. 1225-1226
A letter from Frederick H. Rankin to Stephen F. Austin on 16 Oct 1825 expresses his father Robert's desire to come to Texas and his interest in Indian affairs.

From all of the facts presented above, here is my best estimate as to how Robert and his son Fred were involved in the effort for Texan independence from Mexico.

It appears that in the weeks or possibly couple of months before the Battle of San Jacinto, Sam Houston called upon Robert to effectively be a diplomat to the Indians. Based on the evidence, it is possible that Rankin and Matthew Hubert were leading this effort. But, I also believe that Frederick H. Rankin was involved as well in a more formal and official capacity as a commissioned officer of the Texian Army representing Sam Houston. These diplomatic efforts continued up until just a few days before the Battle of San Jacinto. I believe that Frederick H. Rankin more formally took over Robert's Indian agent role when he left to work on his Revolutionary War pension in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana where he would subsequently die in Nov 1837.

written by Kevin P. Thompson, Oct 2018